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SUMMARY

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MARKETING OF FOODSTUFFS : STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

By F. PARFAIT,
Assistant General Manager,

and J. MILLON,
Agricultural Equipment Manager
of the Société Centrale
pour l'Equipement du Territoire

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MARKETING OF FOODSTUFFS: STRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

By
F. PARFAIT, ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER AND J. MILLON,
AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT MANAGER OF THE SOCIETE CENTRALE
POUR L'EQUIPMENT DU TERRITOIRE

In most countries whose economy is based on trading, the structures for marketing foodstuffs are unsuited to the requirements of modern life, from the point of view of town planning and hygiene as well as the simplification of distribution systems by the elimination of more or less speculative middlemen. Thus in the country producers are often unaware of the general state of the market and frequently have no packaging or refrigerating plant available. In the field of wholesale trade, market buildings have become obsolete; situated in town centres, they have poor road and rail links; built 50 or 100 years ago, they are too small and cause considerable traffic congestion; badly designed, they are ill-suited to the clear fixing of market prices and involve all users in considerable unnecessary overheads. Finally the same general unsuitability is found in the retail trade, where shops are, more often than not, too small and badly designed.

Faced with this situation, France has, for the past ten years or so, been carrying out a vast improvement programme on these buildings.

In the producing areas, a system of packaging and despatch centres has been set up, grouped around market depots termed "of national interest", where marketing and price-fixing are centralised. These markets consist basically of a huge floor-space where goods are displayed, packaging and refrigerated storage stations which are available to farmers and traders, a public information service linked by telex to the European system and, finally, an auction room to encourage the use of this sales method.

A dozen markets of this kind have so far been built in the most important areas: Rhône Valley (Châteaurenard and Avignon), Languedoc (Nîmes and Montpellier), Garonne Valley (Agen and Montauban), Loire Valley (Angers), etc.

In big urban centres, traditional municipal markets are replaced by a national system of wholesale markets designed on extremely modern lines. They have direct links with road and rail services and their expansion potential is enormous. Here, traders have practical premises, with basements, packing stores, refrigerated storerooms, ripening rooms, etc. The buildings are so designed as to allow development to adapt them to new direct, full service marketing methods.

Markets of this kind are already operating in Lyons (opened in 1961), Bordeaux and Toulouse (opened in 1962) and are being built in a dozen more cities such as Strasbourg, Rouen, Grenoble, Rennes, etc.

Moreover the Paris Market is being transferred and work is expected to be complete in 1966. The La Villette Meat Market was begun in 1960 and is going ahead in conjunction with the rebuilding of biggest abattoirs in France. Plans for the Rungis Fruit and Vegetable Market are complete and work began at the end of 1962; it is supplemented by a lorry depot and a collecting centre for empty crates which has been operating since 1960 and which is certainly one of the most original concepts in the modernisation of food packaging handling.

Finally, in the retail trade, the Ministries of Building and Trade have encouraged, in new residential areas, the creation of modern trading centres where new forms of integrated trading, with supermarkets, can develop alongside improved traditional methods. The layout of these centres is decided after careful economic calculations aimed at obtaining low trading margins by concentrating business in a small number of shops and not setting up a monopoly in favour of any one trader or any given trading system. Their siting also obeys certain rules constituting what is now called "commercial town planning". In this way, it is intended to initiate a new trading structure, at the rate of 1 to 2% per annum, and offer an example to independent traders that will prompt them to carry out voluntary general trading reforms, to be largely completed within 10 to 15 years.

It is not yet possible to state the effect of this overall activity on the economy, but it can already be said that the legal, administrative and financial services which have been set up seem perfectly satisfactory and have proved extremely efficient.

On the administrative level the fulfilment of these projects has been entrusted to companies in which public bodies (town councils, chambers of commerce, chambers of agriculture, etc.) have majority holdings. Most of these are associated with public banking institutions (Deposit and Consignment Offices, Agricultural Banks, Land Banks, etc.) and their common subsidiary, the Société Centrale pour l'Equipement du Territoire, which has set up a pool of services and highly experienced technicians which it puts at their disposal for general administrative purposes.

In the financial sphere the State grants long-term loans at reduced rates of interest for the building of the "national interest" markets, investments in which are shared among the towns (for the town planning advantages they offer) and trade users. As to the trading centres, funds are lent to the companies which build them by the State or the Deposit and Consignment Office, backed up by traders who, for this purpose, can take advantage of 15-year loans from the Central Hotel Credit Bank.

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